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SUBJECT: NO SPLITS IN TURKEY'S GOVERNING AKP PARLIAMENTARY

GROUP -- FOR NOW

REF: A. ANKARA 6543

[B.](#) ANKARA 6251

[C.](#) ANKARA 6337

Classified By: PolCouns Janice G. Weiner, E.O. 12958, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Despite media reports and opposition rumors of splits among PM Erdogan's Justice and Development Party's (AKP) 357 parliamentarians, the group remains intact)- for now. Among AKP MPs, there are distinctive pious, pragmatic and nationalist currents, with crosscutting personal loyalties. Recent events in Turkey's heavily-Kurdish southeast have heightened tensions between AKP,s Kurdish-origin MPs and the rest of the parliamentary group. While AKP MPs, numbers may slowly erode over the next year (ref A), a major split is unlikely as long as AKP -- and in particular PM Erdogan -- retain power and popularity. End Summary.

Despite Wishful Thinking, AKP Not Crumbling Yet

[¶2.](#) (C) Over the past year, the Turkish press has repeatedly predicted open splits in the 357-member AKP parliamentary group. While AKP has ideological and personality-based fault lines, there appears to be little chance of a major split while AKP remains Turkey,s number one party and Erdogan the country,s most popular politician. Even Ankara AKP MP Ersonmez Yarbay, a maverick frequently openly critical of his own party, downplayed to us the rumors of party splits, saying they have been fueled by the opposition to force early elections.

AKP,s Ideological Currents

[¶3.](#) (C) AKP,s parliamentary group is composed of politicians with widely differing viewpoints. There are three main ideological currents: pious, nationalist and pragmatic. Most AKP MPs do not fall neatly into any one category, and personal loyalties crosscut ideology, mostly among pious MPs.

Pious

[¶4.](#) (C) Almost all AKP MPs are religiously observant to some degree; for example, the vast majority fast during Ramadan. However, there is a large and distinctively more pious group of MPs, comprising former members of the banned Islamist Virtue (Fazilet) Party, former members of the National View Islamist youth group, and members of a wide range of (officially banned) Muslim brotherhoods. Most of AKP,s top leaders fall into this group: PM Erdogan, DPM/FM Abdullah Gul, parliament Speaker Arinc, Vice Speaker Alptekin (former PM and Islamic Saadet Party head Erbakan's right-hand man) and all five of AKP,s parliamentary whips. Pious MPs generally represent the central Anatolian heartland, speak no English, and have traveled little.

[¶5.](#) (C) While most Turkish Islamists oppose the EU, AKP,s Islamist MPs toe the AKP line and support it, albeit less enthusiastically since October 3. Typical of Turkish Islamists, they dislike Turkey,s military and have no ties to it other than their required military service. Attitudes about the U.S. vary widely, from friendly to suspicious, but most favor better ties with the Muslim world. Although the GOT, under Erdogan,s leadership, has taken a politically courageous public stand favoring privatization and foreign investment, many pious MPs oppose both.

[¶6.](#) (C) AKP,s pious MPs are widely rumored to be deeply unhappy about PM Erdogan,s inability to ease restrictions on the wearing of headscarves and on religious schools. However, since AKP came to power in November 2002, no AKP MP has resigned and gone over to the Happiness (Saadet) Party, on AKP's Islamist flank.

Nationalists

[¶7.](#) (C) It is hard to find a Turk who is not nationalistic. Yet a significant number of AKP MPs (as many as 50, according

to one former MP), many of them former members of the ultra-nationalist National Action Party (MHP) or center-right True Path Party (DYP), are strong nationalists, even by Turkish standards. This group includes Justice Minister and party spokesman Cemil Cicek, Deputy PM Abdullatif Sener, State Minister Kursad Tuzmen, and parliament Vice Speaker Sadik Yakut.

¶8. (C) Among AKP MPs, nationalists take the hardest line against &concessions⁸ to the EU and on Cyprus. MFA officials have told us on several occasions that the GOT is delaying bringing the Ankara Agreement extension protocol to parliament for ratification out of concern for the reaction of nationalist AKP MPs (ref B). Nationalist AKP MPs are deeply suspicious about the motives of Turkey's ethnic Kurds and were vocal critics of PM Erdogan's August declaration in Diyarbakir that Turkey has a &Kurdish problem.⁸ Like their pious colleagues, nationalists, attitudes about the U.S. vary widely, from friendly to suspicious. However, even pro-U.S. nationalists become extremely prickly at any perceived U.S. slight to Turkish national honor.

Pragmatists

¶9. (C) AKP's pragmatic MPs generally speak English, are foreign-educated, and tend to be better-traveled than their colleagues. They often come from large cosmopolitan areas, particularly Ankara or Istanbul; some were previously members of the center-right Motherland Party (ANAP). Three of AKP's five vice chairs, who frequently deal with foreigners, are from the pragmatic wing: Bulent Gedikli, Reha Denemec and Saban Disli. All are U.S-educated and represent either Istanbul or Ankara. The same is true for pragmatic Erdogan translator and foreign policy advisor Egemen Bagis, who accompanies the PM on his trips to Europe and the U.S.

¶10. (C) Although the pragmatic MPs are often AKP's most visible face to foreigners, they have less influence inside AKP than their pious and nationalist colleagues. In early 2005, there were signs of frustration among AKP's moderates, when a spate of AKP MP resignations went mostly to ANAP. Culture Minister Mumcu, AKP's highest-profile resignation who went on to become ANAP's Chairman, said publicly he had only felt like a &guest⁸ in AKP (ref C).

¶11. (C) Erdogan can ill afford to lose the pragmatists. In addition to giving AKP a reasonable, big-tent image that plays well in the U.S. and Europe, AKP's pragmatists are links to Istanbul and Ankara elites. These MPs are AKP's friendliest face toward the U.S. (Bagis heads parliament's Turkey/U.S Friendship Committee), and most receptive to liberal political and open market economic reforms needed for EU accession.

Crosscutting Personal Loyalties

¶12. (C) AKP MPS are as divided by personality as by politics, but personality-based fault lines crosscut ideological ones. PM Erdogan is the glue that holds AKP together; a chunk of AKP MPs were part of Erdogan's team when he was Istanbul mayor and have followed him onto the national stage. They include Finance Minister Unakitan, Transportation Minister Yildirim, State Minister Cubukcu, AKP whip Irfan Gunduz, and Erdogan speechwriter Huseyin Besli. All are personally pious or, in Cubukcu's case, at least have consistently supported positions of the party's pious wing. Cubukcu, a female, was one of the few MPs who publicly supported Erdogan's 2004 proposal to re-criminalize adultery.

¶13. (C) Erdogan has consistently protected all three "Istanbul" Ministers despite repeated calls for their resignation. Many other AKP MPs profess staunch loyalty to &Tayyip Bey⁸ and seek to stay close to him. One contact suggests that Erdogan's strategy is to keep subordinates competing with each other for his attention so they are too busy to be a threat to him.

¶14. (C) DPM/FM Gul remains Erdogan's chief political rival within AKP. Their differences are not ideological) Gul and Erdogan are both pious) but spring from Gul's ambitions for greater power. Gul, who represents the parliamentary faction of the banned Virtue Party, has a small, quiet following among AK MPs that includes whip Salih Kapusuz (from Gul's home town of Kayseri), former AKP public relations vice chair Murat Mercan (sacked for incompetence by Erdogan earlier this year) and Taner Yildiz (also from Kayseri).

¶15. (C) Parliament Speaker Arinc is AKP's third leading personality and potential future rival to Erdogan. However, Arinc is well behind Gul in influence and, according to our contacts, currently without a significant group of MP loyalists.

¶16. (C) About 60 AKP MPs, mostly from Turkey's southeast, are of Kurdish origin; Political and Legal Affairs Vice Chair Dengir Mir Firat is AKP's most visible Kurdish MP. The Kurds who joined AKP and were elected to parliament tend to be pious, stressing the common bonds among all Muslims over Kurdish nationalism. (The strongest Kurdish nationalists ran from the pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party (DEHAP) in 2002 elections and failed to enter parliament because DEHAP did not cross the ten percent electoral threshold.) One former Kurdish-origin MP, himself pious, has consistently told us even he considers AKP's Kurdish MPs extraordinarily passive on Kurdish issues.

¶17. (C) Yet recent events in the southeast, including AKP nationalists' reaction against PM Erdogan's August & Kurdish problem8 speech in Diyarbakir and alleged Jandarma involvement in a November bombing in the southeastern town of Semdinli, have created tension between AKP's Kurdish-origin MPs and the rest of the parliamentary group. An Ankara provincial AKP official told us recently that tension with AKP's Kurdish-origin MPs has infected AKP's pious wing, weakening it relative to other AKP factions.

¶18. (C) Comment: AKP's parliamentary strength, so far, springs from Erdogan's ability to keep such a diverse group of MPs united, and the lack of any viable opposition. The question is whether Erdogan can continue to keep the parliamentary group together without turning AKP into an internally-undemocratic, personality-based party in the classic Turkish tradition. AKP's opposition will eventually come from inside AKP itself. However, for now, Erdogan appears well in control and there is no viable political alternative for dissatisfied AKP MPs. End Comment.
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